

**Monmouth County,
Rich in Natural
Resources, Found
Prosperity in its
Summer Resorts and
Farmland Products**

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES:

Surf and Soil



Monmouth County Court House, built in 1874 and remodeled in 1930, is the fifth in Freehold history. The first was built in 1715.

This is the thirteenth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Morris County.

STARS aplenty crowd the stage in the unfolding of the Monmouth County drama, yet credit for pointing the story in a definite direction must go to two unidentified bit players—the Irishman who recognized greensand marl in the soil near Freehold in 1768 and the Long Branch woman who took in surf-loving boarders in 1788.

In all truth, the players who preceded and followed the Irishman and the boarding-house proprietor embodied far more dash and excitement. Nevertheless, in capitalizing on the natural resources of Monmouth County, the anonymous characters firmly set the pace of the Monmouth story. In real life Irish-Boy probably never met Boarding-House-Girl, but what they represented did, resulting in a long and happy marriage of resort and farm.

More than a century of careful setting of the stage preceded the state's first extensive use of marl and the first Long Branch boarding house. Prosperity came easily after the first settlers drifted over from Gravesend, L. I., in 1664 to settle huge plantations in Middletown and Shrewsbury. Some of the Indians grumbled a bit; Richard Hartshorne had to guarantee them the right to pick beach plums on Sandy Hook before they sold him vast acreage on the Atlantic Highlands.

Middletown and Shrewsbury had prominence enough in 1675 to warrant being established as a loosely defined "County of Nevysink." By then Col. Lewis Morris had acquired control of New Jersey's first iron works, started in 1674 on the "Falls of Shrewsbury" by James Grover. Morris bought 3,540 acres on the Shrewsbury River "to dig, delve and carry away all such mines for iron as they shall find." He called his plantation Tintern Manor, which local usage corrupted to "Tinton" and then "Tinton Falls."

INFLUENCE naturally followed the state's first ironmaster, so when Monmouth became one of East Jersey's first four colonies in 1682 Morris had it named Monmouth after his native Monmouthshire, Wales. East Jersey Proprietors looked fondly on Monmouth; in the 1680s it was the wealthiest county in the province of Jersey—and consequently paid the most taxes. Already Monmouth was known as "a great resort for industrious and reputable farmers."

A boatload of Scotsmen stranded on the Jersey coast made their way inland to near Freehold in 1685, some Dutch traveled across Raritan Bay from New York in the 1690s and French Huguenots settled in the county in 1700. Meanwhile, a few settlers found their way to Allentown and Imlaystown. Thus, settlements were spread enough to warrant the choice of a centralized county seat late in 1713 at Monmouth Court House (Freehold).

A few weeks later one John Reid, who must rate with Monmouth's more enterprising residents, bought land where county fathers had decided the new Court House would be. Generously he sold a plot to the county for 30 shillings. His generosity was exceeded only by his business acumen; the building of the first Court House in 1715 made his own holdings increase tremendously in value.

Bordered on the north by Raritan Bay and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, Monmouth County naturally looked upon the waters as its main transportation arteries. Such exceptionally broad and well-protected streams as the Shrewsbury, Navesink, Shark and Manasquan rivers made ocean commerce thrive. Navesink Highlands and Sandy Hook had light-houses on them before the Revolution, with the beacon on the Hook (built in 1762) being one of the oldest in the country.

DOWN-COUNTY (called "Upper" Freehold, oddly enough), grist mills hummed busily on Doctor's Creek at Allentown and Imlaystown and on Crosswicks Creek at Waln's Mills long before the Revolution. Scows laden with flour went down the Crosswicks to Philadelphia, since Lower Monmouth (or "Upper Freehold") naturally looked to the West.

Early in the 18th Century a big New Englander named Mordecai Lincoln came to Upper Freehold Township, where he married Hannah Salter, daughter of wealthy landowner Richard Salter. They set up housekeeping near Mordecai's forge at Fillmore and reared a family. One of their sons, John, became the great-grandfather of President Abraham Lincoln.

Historians who recorded the discovery of marl on Peter Schenck's farm near Freehold in 1768 forgot to get the name of the discoverer. Listed simply as "an Irishman," the anonymous agricultural benefactor recognized the greensand marl from having used it in "the old country." Tried on nearby fields on the Irishman's say-so, the marl produced "extraordinary re-

sults." Quickly its usage enriched surrounding farms and gave the region its name, "Marlboro."

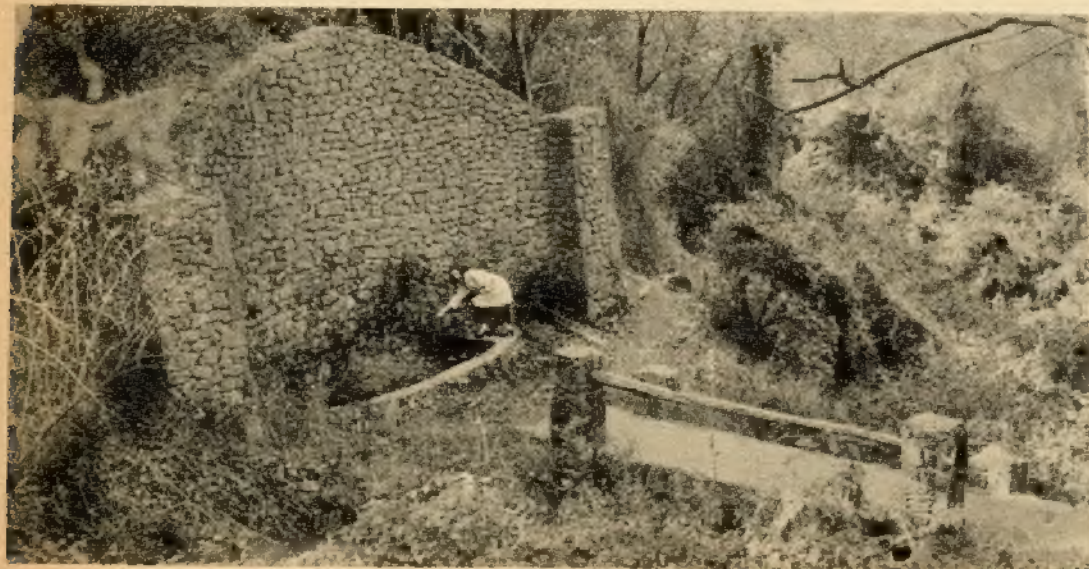
MONMOUTH suffered cruelly during the Revolution, both from small bands of British troops who slipped in from the sea and from Tories who banded together on Sandy Hook or hid in the forests. Further woes came from the pine robbers, who as often as not struck at either side. Jacob Fagan and Lewis Fenton gained notoriety as bandit leaders, while Gen. David (Black David) Forman hunted them down mercilessly as "hung them without waiting for superfluous ceremony."

That strictly local pattern of warfare exploded on June 28, 1778, when Gen. Washington's army finally caught up with Gen. Clinton's British troops in the fields west of Monmouth Court House (Freehold). Washington held a slight advantage in troops but Clinton had superior position in the thick woods and extensive marshlands.

The chance of a full American victory vanished at the outset when Gen. Charles Lee disobeyed Washington's orders to attack. Washington faced the sulky Lee on the battlefield and in his anger "swore 'til the leaves shook in the trees." What motivated Lee has never been made clear, but he was court-martialed and dismissed from service for his actions. Meanwhile the battle raged all day without decision before Clinton slipped off and over the Highlands.

Both sides suffered severe losses in the indecisive action, from the deadly June heat as well as from enemy fire. The heat brought to the fore an American heroine of legendary proportions—red-haired, freckle-faced Irish Molly Hays, who had followed her husband John to the battlefield from Carlisle, Pa. Under the hot June sun Molly carried water from a nearby creek to the parched soldiers. An enemy bullet wounded John, whereupon Molly, so legend has it, took his place at the

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This spring, near Atlantic Highlands, replenished water supply of Henry Hudson's "Half Moon" moored in Sandy Hook Bay in 1609.

MONMOUTH COUNTY



Shaft commemorating famous Battle of Monmouth in 1778 at Freehold.



The boardwalk at Asbury Park, one of the best-known of North Jersey coast resorts. Nearby Long Branch attracted Philadelphians as early as 1750.



Saddled and bugler's call

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cannon and earned immortality for herself as "Molly Pitcher."

One shocking war episode remained for Monmouth. Capt. Joshua Huddy of Colt's Neck, captured at Toms River in March, 1782, faced charges that he had killed Tory Philip White. Evidence proved Huddy had been in a British prison when White was shot, but a British company executed him on the gallows at the foot of Navesink hills. Huddy's death outraged and stunned even British leaders.

BITTERNESS subsided quickly in Monmouth, however, possibly because of the remarkably deep roots of its churches. Shrewsbury, for example, had New Jersey's first Quaker meeting house, built in 1682. The state's first Baptist congregation organized at Middletown in 1668. Christ Church, Middletown, and Christ Church, Shrewsbury, were both organized in October, 1702, while St. Peter's Church, Freehold, traced its beginning back to 1695. Old Tennent Church was built in 1751, and Bethesda Methodist Church at Adelphia, founded in 1780, was the state's oldest regularly constituted Methodist Church.

A few wealthy men came to Monmouth's shore after the Revolution and built Summer homes, the most noted being U. S. Senator William Bingham of Philadelphia, who entertained lavishly at his residence at Rumson Neck. However, it remained for an unidentified old lady in charge of a palatial mansion at Long Branch to open the

shore to Summer "renters." Elliston Perot of Philadelphia persuaded the old lady to rent him the building in 1788, on condition of providing the beds and the food.

Other Philadelphians begged the privilege of sharing the big old house with the Perots and this gave one Mr. McKnight an idea. He bought the mansion for \$2,000, invited the best families of Philadelphia (no rabble, mind you) and quickly cleared \$40,000 on his investment. Another accommodation, conducted by Messrs. Herbert and Chandler, advertised in 1792 "a good stock of liquors and everything necessary for the entertainment of ladies and gentlemen."

LONG BRANCH vied with Cape May by 1800 for the favors of Philadelphia folk, many of whom made the long trek across state in shore wagons, returning after their owners sold loads of fish in Philadelphia or Trenton. Farmers along the Monmouth coast opened their homes to visitors, aware that cultivating Summer visitors offered far better prospects than digging their thin beachfront soil.

Long Branch gained particular attention for its discreet bathing regulations. When a white flag went up only ladies bathed; when a red flag went up only gentlemen tested the surf. Strangers often went on the beach at the wrong times (through ignorance, of course), and one day in 1819 a wag hoisted both flags together, "which created some awful squinting and no little confusion."

Inland from the sea, untroubled by red or white flags, farmers sowed marl over land once considered useless and nature responded. Monmouth farms by 1840 were "under the best state of cultivation." Many families began growing Irish potatoes in the 1840s with yields so great that the invention of a mechanical potato digger by Thomas Stout of Keyport in 1846 met a pressing need.

ALL Monmouth throbbed with transportation hopes and plans in the decades preceding the Civil War. Steamers had provided the logical link with New York from the late 1820s with vessels touching at Sandy Hook, Keyport, Matawan, Oceanport, Bank, Eatontown Landing and Long Branch. Many of them brought Summer visitors, of course, but the trade provided stability.

Oceanport's steamers also carried products from James P. Allaire. Works in Howell Township from 1846. Allaire, New York ironmaster, bought the Howell Township from an owner who had established it soon after the start of the 19th century. The works prospered for decades and its products enjoyed wide distribution until Allaire & Co. closed it in 1846.

Red Bank and Keyport both prospered rapidly after steamers started running their docks in the 1830s. Red Bank called "the most rapidly increasing village in the state except for Keyport" in 1840, carried on a brisk trade in vegetables, wood and oysters.



Farmland scene near Imlavstown, one of the Monmouth areas which has contributed much to the county's strong agricultural position.

RIGHT: Observation point along Scenic Drive at Atlantic Highlands commands view of Sandy Hook, Lower New York Bay and the Atlantic.



mounted, thoroughbreds parade in the paddock while waiting for summoning them to starting line at Monmouth Park Race Track.



Old Tennent Church, erected in 1732 and enlarged in 1751. Adjacent to it are Molly Pitcher's well and fields where Battle of Monmouth was fought.

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port, established in 1830, hoped for great importance when promoters began to build a cross-state plank road from Keyport to Florence in 1852. Only short stretches were built, however, before the impracticability of the wooden highway became apparent.

FARMERS indorsed railroad ventures, getting behind the Freehold & Jamesburg Railroad in 1853 and the Raritan & Delaware Bay Railroad in 1854. Branch railroads pushed out to big marl beds at Squankum and Marlboro. A short line carried farm produce from Freehold to Keyport piers. Finally, the building of the New York & Long Branch Railroad in the late 1860s and early 1870s ended the farmer's dependence on the seaports.

The N. Y. & L. B., rolling down over the sandy wastes, slowly changed the character of the shore by making it possible for vacationists to come in as easily as farm produce went out. With the exception of Long Branch, the North Jersey shore was little frequented before 1870, except by those who could afford to stay all Summer.

Take, as prime examples, Ocean Grove and Asbury Park. Only one family lived at Ocean Grove in July, 1869, when 20 people pitched their tents on 11 acres of beachfront purchased for \$50. The following year 26 members of the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association each put up \$25 to buy more land, which they auctioned off on June 1, 1870, for \$1,500.

The notion of a religious seaside re-

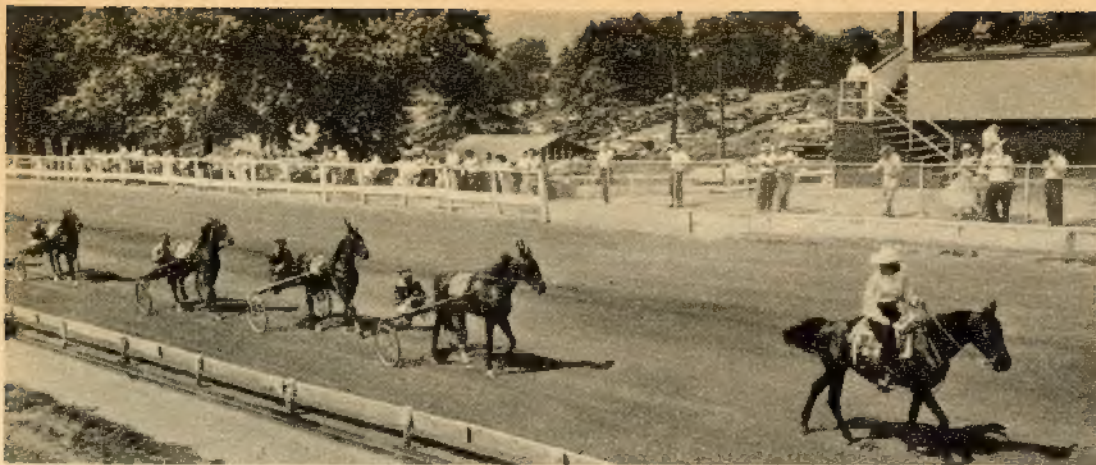
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Bridge over the Navesink River at Rumson. In the background are the Highlands of Navesink.

Color photos by Porter.





At Freehold Raceway, home of trotters and pacers. Project was started by the Monmouth County Agricultural Society in 1853.

MONMOUTH COUNTY

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sort "free from the dissipations and follies of fashionable watering places" caught on with a rush. Sixty cottages were built by the end of 1871; by 1875 lots purchased for \$50 at the 1870 auction brought \$1,500.

JAMES A. BRADLEY, New York City brush manufacturer, bought the first lot at Ocean Grove, but his thoughts dwelt on the briar-covered acres across the lake to the north. Not a soul lived on the beach in 1870 and the asking price of \$90,000 for 500 acres seemed ridiculously high. Bradley bought, nevertheless, and named his wilderness Asbury Park after Bishop Francis Asbury. The first hotel was built in 1873 and eight large hotels and hundreds of smaller boarding houses covered Bradley's Folly in 1878.

Railroad statistics for Asbury Park and Ocean Grove in 1883 illustrate the quick transition from wilderness to resort. As many as 103 trains brought 8,000 people in one day and a total of 600,000 people visited the two towns between June and September, 1883.

Summer resorts of widely varying natures sprang up in the county. Many of them, particularly in the region of the Highlands and the Navesink and Shrewsbury rivers, became highly exclusive. However, until the late 19th Century, farmers continued to make Wreck Pond near Sea Girt their destination on the second Saturday in August in celebration of "Beach Day" (many of them traveling great distance in wagons with bathing suits under their overalls and pinafores). That area grew less bucolic, however, after the Governor and his staff began visiting Sea Girt every August to review National Guard troops.

As early as the Summer of 1884 Guardsmen held rifle practice on the north side of Manasquan Inlet but it was not until 1890 that a large Sea Girt tract was set aside by the state as a National Guard reservation. Men trained there for three wars, although Jersey Guardsmen were sent to other camps during World Wars I and II and the Sea Girt camp employed for the polishing of Army specialists.

GUSTAV KOBBE'S 1889 guidebook had this comment on other Monmouth shore resorts: Spring Lake, "a resort conspicuous for elegance"; Elberon, "laid out with much taste"; Monmouth Beach, "its great charms are privacy and refinement"; Rumson Neck, "on all sides there is evidence that it is controlled by people of wealth and taste"; Sea Bright (where foreign cricket teams and great tennis players always visited), "one of the gayest resorts on the coast."

Long Branch boomed particularly. President Grant for a time made Long Branch the nation's Summer capital. Presidents Hayes and Harrison stayed at the old Elberon Hotel and President Garfield came home to die in Long Branch after he was shot in 1881.

(President Wilson also stayed in Long Branch in later years.)

The tone of the resort changed considerably in the 1890s as flamboyant characters made Long Branch a playground. Quite obviously, the red and white bathing flags had long since vanished. Phil Daly ran his gambling house even on Sundays, and such as Lillie Langtry, Diamond Jim Brady and Lillian Russell found the resort to their fancy. The sporting set thought Long Branch wonderful, but Kobbe's guidebook declared the resort probably repelled as many as it attracted. Be that as it may, Long Branch remained one of the country's most noted resorts throughout the 19th Century.

MONMOUTH PARK, in nearby Eatontown, lured the Long Branch crowd after racing started in 1870, but by the 1890s that, too, had fallen under a cloud. The park had rocky days until 1878, when a new group took it over. Then racing days increased from four in 1878 to 25 in 1888 and purses jumped in those years from \$12,600 to \$210,850. Indignation against state race tracks in the 1890s closed them all until a new Monmouth Park, this one in Oceanport, now draws the faithful.

Monmouth County's reputation for fine horses dated to Colonial days. As far back as 1840 the Lairds of Colt's Neck trained horses, with the little mare Fashion becoming nationally famous. Joe Laird, who rode Fashion, became known as the "best jockey of the North." Noted stud farms grew up in the Eatontown-Tinton Falls-Scobeyville-Holmdel region (where, incidentally, many splendid horse farms still exist).

FEW of New Jersey's counties had their characters so firmly set at the turn of the century as Monmouth. By then farming had become predominant, though marl had largely given way to more balanced fertilizers. Monmouth had become "The Shore" to

North Jersey as the result of improved railroad transportation. Changes in the county since then have been largely a matter of degree rather than kind.

Throughout Monmouth's long life the sea has been the background for most of the action, bringing pirates, colonists, enemy troops and vacationists (more or less in that order). Sandy Hook lighthouse and Navesink's twin lighthouses blinked security to vessels on the Atlantic's swelling surf. Still, through the years ships have smashed upon Monmouth's shores—such as the New Era, which broke up in December, 1854, off Deal Beach with a loss of 500 lives, and the Morro Castle, whose burning hulk drifted to rest at Asbury Park in September, 1934.

Bootleggers came by sea, too, in the Thirsty Twenties. Atop the Highlands, in a home formerly owned by Oscar Hammerstein, illicit liquor salesmen erected one of the nation's most powerful radio stations. They supplied customers from Maine to Florida before a 1929 raid broke up the ring (or, at least, moved it elsewhere).

Manasquan Inlet also had its visitations by bootlegging operators during the prohibition period. However, the wide waterline dividing Monmouth and Ocean counties is better known as a haven for private and public fishing boats and the start of the important Inland Waterway stretching all the way to Florida. Noted artists and writers have made their homes on the borders of Manasquan Inlet and a parade of celebrities, most notably Robert Louis Stevenson, made their way to the old Union House which stood in what is now Brielle.

Sandy Hook's exposed position also has made it a logical spot for fortification. A fort was started there before the Civil War, but by the 1890s it had not been finished. Then the Hook reverberated to the sound of a proving range. The smokeless powder which Hudson Maxim developed at Farmingdale in 1893 was tested on the Hook. Since then Fort Hancock has served the nation in peace and war, but the advent of the Korean war interrupted

plans for making the Hook a state park.

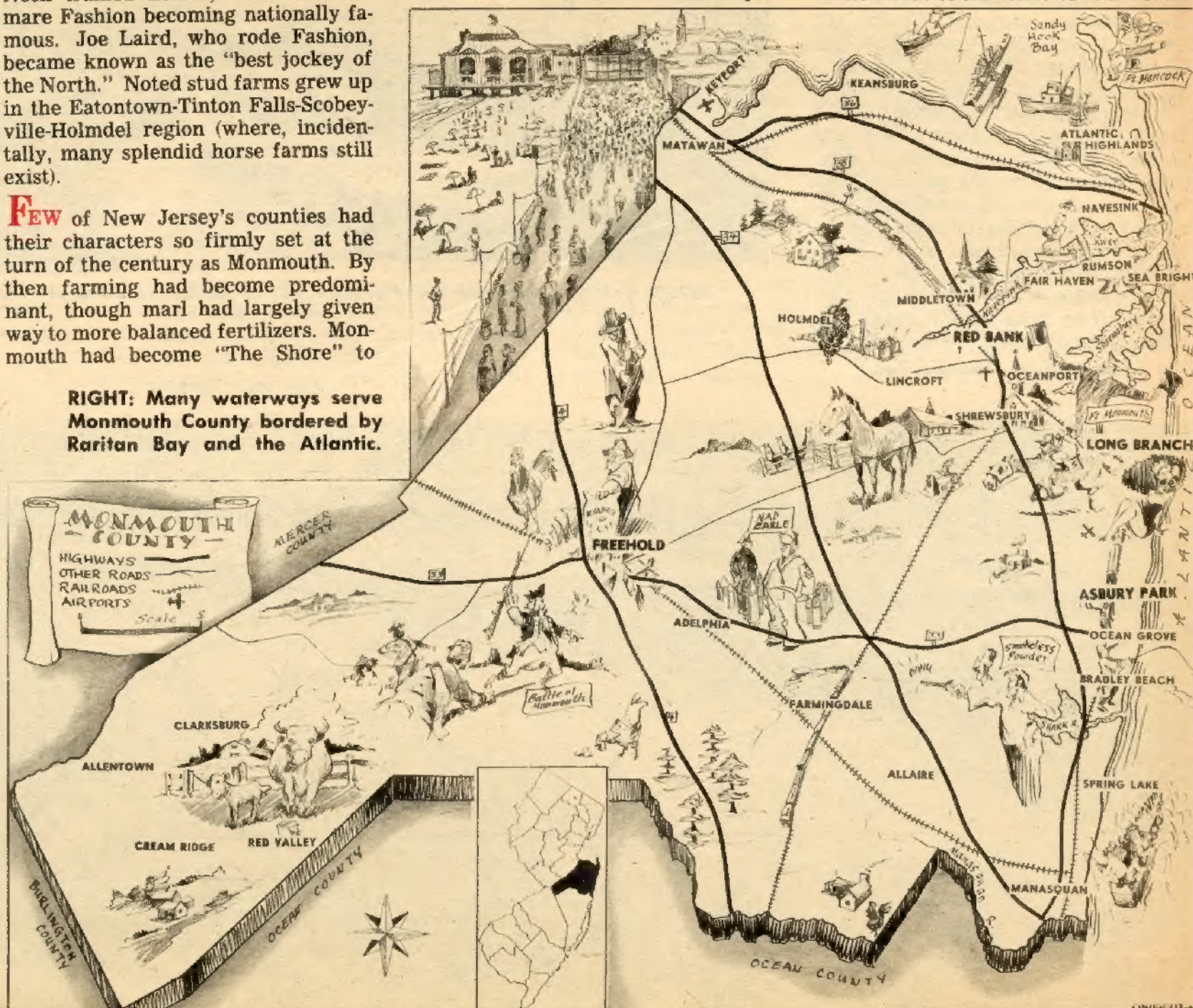
MONMOUTH population has grown from 82,037 in 1900 to more than 225,000 today. Since 1940 the growth has been especially great, with more than 65,000 new residents moving to Monmouth in the last decade. The result has been to move Monmouth toward an "all-year" status (which in no way hurts the annual welcoming of millions of Summer visitors).

Industry has made only slight inroads in Monmouth County, but Long Branch, Red Bank and Freehold have industrial roots. The largest industry continues to be the long-established Karagheusian rug plant at Freehold, where more than 2,000 persons are employed.

Farming, however, is THE money-maker in Monmouth. Each year the county vies with Cumberland for state dollar-farm leadership. Monmouth has an impressive list of agricultural firsts: First in number of farms (2,530), in Irish potatoes (with about one-third of the state's total acreage), in poultry and poultry products, in products of orchards, vineyards and planted nut trees. Down in Upper Freehold dairies range through the aptly named Cream Ridge section. Potato fields, truck gardens and chicken ranches spread everywhere.

ALL Monmouth comes uniquely together for a Midsummer visitor (particularly if he goes by way of Englishtown and Freehold). He sees wonderfully preserved old homes and churches, "Molly Pitcher's Well," potatoes, chickens. He lolls on the beach (without worry over red or white flags). After enjoying the sea he stops at a roadside truck garden stand to enjoy the fruits of the soil.

In a way, that stop at the stand celebrates the "marriage" of the Irishman who discovered the richness of the soil and the boarding house lady who became aware of the richness of the surf.



RIGHT: Many waterways serve Monmouth County bordered by Raritan Bay and the Atlantic.